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SELF-EFFORT.

AN ADDRESS

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IN THE

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BY

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ADDRESS.

In addressing the students of the college upon the subject of Self-effort, I do not wish to be understood as in any way speaking in depreciation of the higher education obtained by extended study at the Seats of Learning. My desire is only to say some words of encouragement to ingenuous youth, who may be deprived by circumstances of the advantages afforded by the great Universities.

Life has been likened to a game of Whist, where the cards are dealt out by destiny, which fixes the rules of the game. The players are left to win or lose according to their manner and skill in playing. In such a game no one would think of winning without first becoming possessed of a full knowledge of the cards and the rules governing the play.

So the fortune of each person depends upon his knowing something of the rules of a game vastly more intricate and important. This game is the Game of Life, and the board upon which it is played is the world. As the fate of each player turns upon his manner and skill in playing, how necessary it is

that he should be well informed so as to play his part to win. How unwise it would be to lose from indifference and ignorance. Where the stake is success in life, we would suppose that there would be an eager pursuit to become thoroughly equipped for the contest; that from the start there would be a supreme desire to acquire knowledge, and to discipline the mind so as to play well. That this is possible for every one, will be my endeavor to show.

That every individual has the power to educate, discipline and advance himself is the strong assertion of reason, and experience brings her testimony in proof. The power of reasoning, projecting and executing is characteristic of mankind. Every one can think, reflect and act; can guide and form himself. In this power over self, this freedom of will and action, consists the sublimity of life. This self-sufficient, self-controlling power, gives true dignity and nobility to man. It makes him great as man, be he where or what he may. He is a free agent, not subject in his cultivation and growth, either to the helps or hindrances of society. It is not such a place and such circumstances alone, which afford an opportunity for the development of our faculties. For the culture of our minds we have not only to learn, but to contemplate, and every situation and condition gives time and opportunity for the exercise of thought and reflection. Grant that a man has been shut out from

advantages of learning; grant that necessity has compelled him to manual labor, yet he has not been debarred from the exercise of his mind or from study in the open school of the world. The intellect is not bound with the hands. Information for improvement can be gained in the crowded walks of life; by the wayside; in the busy mart; from the affairs of men, and from the laws and works of creation. All, even those with only moderate capacity, can cultivate the taste for and the habit of reading. There is scarcely any one so situated as not to be able to devote at least half an hour a day to good, sound reading. Books are at all times and in all places agreeable companions; they present in review the events of all ages and open the door to all arts and sciences. By them the reader is introduced into the company of the gifted and great of all countries. From them instruction is received, knowledge is acquired, wisdom is gained, judgment is ripened, pleasure is derived, and character is formed. If half an hour each day for a year was given to reading, the mind would become stored with knowledge sufficient to furnish food for thought during a life-time. If this habit was continued from year to year, with comprehension and reflection, the mind would become enlarged and enriched with a liberal education. It was by pursuing this method that Elihu Burritt became famous as the "learned blacksmith." He studied the Greek grammar while working at the

forge. He became the master of twenty-six languages, and a successful writer and lecturer.

In any condition that a man may be placed he can think and act studiously and nobly if he chooses. The school of life gives to the thoughtful man a training of the faculties, and a development of the powers. It furnishes the means by which the mind may be disciplined and cultivated. It supplies the ability to reason. The exercise of thought, the culture of the intellect, is not confined to classic shades or scientific retreats. The earnest seeker gathers knowledge in all places. The rose blossoms and sheds its fragrance in the wilderness as well as in the garden. Some of the most valuable works of learning have been produced in situations which, in the estimation of mankind, afforded no opportunity for intellectual effort. Every one is invited to a studentship in the great school of Nature, whose books are wide open for all to read and study, and so increase the intellectual power and enlarge the understanding.

One of the first requisites of cultivation, is a sense of the importance and of the superiority of mental worth. The advantages of learning should be imprinted upon the heart. He who does not discern good will never seek it. The eagle rejoices in the light or it would never rise to meet the sun; the serpent finds its place in the dust and there winds its

course. If we are pleased with worthless objects, we are worthless. If we employ ourselves upon the trivial, the paltry and the perishing things of time, we are little better than the brute, "whose spirit goeth downward," and can never reach a place among the higher order of intelligences. The beginning of greatness is the contemplation and love of it. To gain our greatest culture and advancement, we must learn that there is a nobler object than material aggrandizement. We must seek excellence for its own sake.

Again, a strong and insatiable desire is necessary to self-improvement. Without a thirst for knowledge, no one will ever drink deep at its springs. If a man has no ambition to rise, he is doomed always to grovel. There can be no endeavor without expectation of success. Hope ever lures to action; without it man sinks into supineness. He who has no relish for mental culture, generally has no talent to acquire it, but he who has an inclination for the acquisition of knowledge is rarely without the ability to attain it. An earnest wish to succeed is always an indication that we can succeed. We must not only fix our eyes upon the good, but an eager longing to make it our own must drive us to action. Earnest aspirations awake corresponding effort. Would we attain a high degree of excellence it must be made an important end of life. It must continually engage our atten-

tion, and all our forces must be concentrated upon it, for indolence and inattention will weaken the best efforts. To accomplish any great undertaking we must bestow upon it our undivided affection, our unimpaired devotion. Careless and indifferent conduct are sure precursors of failure in any undertaking. "Remember each day, young men," said Napoleon to the pupils of a school which he visited, "that upon your conduct this day, hangs a chance of fortune or misfortune for your future life."

Whatever the object of our pursuit, we must give to it our whole mind. It must reign paramount in our breast and exclude every other which would divide its strength. The glories of conquest fire the gladiator and animate him to lay aside every thing that could hinder him in the strife; to sustain any trials or hardships; to practice the severest physical discipline. Thus the athlete, who would wear the victor's crown in the great contest of life, must so prize the honors which await success, as to refrain from every action that would tend to unnerve his arm or loose his sinew, and practice self-denial. Pitt, the younger, in early life became greatly enamoured with a young lady, but withdrew wholly from her society and never married, fearing that his attention might thereby be diverted from the race upon which he had started for the Premiership of England.

“ His spirit wholly turned,
To stern ambition's dream; to that fierce strife,
Which leads to life's high places, and recked not
What lovely flowers might perish in his path.”

He won the prize and became Prime Minister.

The soul desiring the great object must also feel itself capable of attaining it. It must cherish a steady reliance upon its own powers ; a firm confidence in its own inward force. The thought that we can execute an undertaking gives assurance that we are able to do so. A belief that whatever we attempt we can accomplish, is an important step toward its accomplishment. It makes us equal to any effort however great ; sufficient for any trials however severe. Faith imparts strength to remove seemingly insurmountable barriers, and to conquer the most formidable difficulties. It prepares us cheerfully and manfully to undergo the greatest privations and sacrifices. It bids us dare all and suffer all. Without it self-culture is impossible, for doubt ever weakens action. Distrust is the deadliest enemy of success. The victory is never awarded to the doubting trembler, but the bold and confident champion snatches the deathless laurel. “ Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt.” The repeated failures of Lord Beaconsfield in his first attempts as a writer and speaker never engendered in his mind a doubt of his ultimate triumph. Instead of disheartening, they acted as spurs to goad him on

in renewed efforts, until he reached success, and placed his name high on England's roll of Authors and Orators.

Trusting in his own abilities man must also dismiss hope of success from outward aid, and look within for light and support. He must think for himself, then only will he increase. He must stand alone, then only will he prevail. Help from without is enfeebling. Regardless of the power and acts of others, he must feel his own power, and insist upon his own acts, for when he leans upon society he will lose his individuality and cease to advance. When he is dependent, he ceases to provide for himself. Reliance upon foreign influences enervates the mind. When we allow others to think and act for us, we lose hope of calling into action the force that slumbers in our own bosoms. It was not by trusting to the thoughts and acts of others that Mohammed wrote his Koran; Wickliffe inaugurated the Reformation, or Napoleon "worked his epic poem." They were lighted throughout their careers by the fires that were kindled in their own breasts. In their achievements they were guided only by their inward spirits. They relied upon their own strength to sustain them, amid either the smiles and favors, or the frowns and neglects of the world. Thus has it been with all men worthy of mention. When we think for ourselves, and obey the promptings of our own

hearts, we acquire greater strength of purpose and robustness of mind.

A strong inherent will power is also necessary. A sufficient will must always command sufficient means. A man with a fixed purpose will rarely fail, for a hazard of every thing for the fulfillment of that purpose must ultimately effect it. An invincible determination to overcome all obstacles that impede progress, is one of the secrets of success. In all things the resolution to conquer betokens the victory. A firm purpose to use our best endeavors in self-improvement will generally open to us an opportunity and command success. If we have the right will, the power shall not be denied us. All history teaches that it is the decisive act that tells; that every thing depends upon it. In every age we behold the man of decision and determination overcoming all difficulties; pushing through all obstructions and conquering. The master-spirits of the world are those who are governed by an unyielding will. The irresolute multitude follow in their wake. So vast is the power of a bold and obstinate will, that it is able, even when unaccompanied with greatness, either moral or intellectual, to uproot fixed customs. A deep sincerity, a genuine earnestness, are requisite for the achievement of any greatness whatever. Without them man is a vacillating being, groping his way in blindness, but with them "he is the emperor of the

earth, and can tread with an angel's hope," upon every thing that shall hinder him from his object. A single heart, whether it have its being under a thatched or tiled roof, whether it be nurtured at the university or at the plough, if sustained by an inflexible will, is superior to all trials. No power can subdue it, or cause it to waver in its course. It must attain its end.

Thus with a love of excellence; a desire for improvement; faith in ability; self-reliance and will power, the means by which mental wealth may be secured, will come from self-effort.

The stern condition upon which we hold our faculties requires that we ourselves should be their cultivator, director and master. They are not dependent upon outward influences, or subject to outward constraint. Institutions of learning teach the student how to improve and develop himself. They act as a guide and stimulus to the acquisition of knowledge, but cannot ingraft it without the mind's own volition. The student must develop himself. His self-effort is the source of individual growth; his mind must expand by his own endeavor. No matter under what favorable or unfavorable circumstances he may have been reared, they can neither elevate nor depress him, separate from his own agency. A man may be surrounded by circumstances over which he has no

control, but he need not be their victim, for his conduct is in his own power. We may be subjected to the most diligent training; the most distinguished masters may rule over us; it will be in vain without our own voluntary efforts. It is the man that makes himself. He is the former of his character; the builder of his fortune. He alone can exalt; he alone can sully his manhood.

It matters not so much how the mind is situated and acted upon as how it acts itself. "The mould," says Bacon, "of a man's fortune is in his own hands." The mind is not a machine that can move only when propelled from without. It can be expanded by no mechanism; but must expand itself; must toil alone in the fields of thought in order to grow. It must dig the ore of sound learning for itself. Mental worth cannot be trafficked for or inherited. Favorable circumstances may assist our advancement, but they do not cause it. Props may support a tree and change its bent, but they do not give it life. Unfavorable circumstances may retard our advancement, but they cannot prevent it. Though the plant may be obstructed, yet mounting in its strength, it will struggle through to the light. When man feels and exerts the irresistible force within, then will he foster and improve his powers. The willow requires soft and moist ground in which to grow, and hence is soft and light; the acorn nourishes itself on the rough

soil in the wilderness and rises to be the hardy monarch of the forest. It is only as man has realized that "in his own bosom dwelt his destiny's star" that he has accomplished any worthy undertaking, or made any notable attainment in knowledge. Before we can make any great progress, or succeed in any work of magnitude, we must rid ourselves of the false impression that the mind is dependent upon instructors and schools for its culture; that the intellect can be exercised and trained, only in favorable situations, and under peculiar advantages; that an education can be acquired only in the university.

The reason why so few strive to cultivate and strengthen the intellect is, that they have been taught that its exercise depended not so much upon their own efforts as upon advantageous circumstances. Without the aid of the teacher, they have despaired of unbarring the doors of learning. Many a noble spirit, hemmed in by fate, has turned a hopeless glance to the university, as affording the only means of improvement; whereas if it had put forth its own might and vigor; if it had felt that man is his own instructor, and that it is by his own endeavor, whether in or out of the schools, that he overcomes and succeeds in the great work of cultivating his faculties, it might have developed its slumbering powers. Individual effort is the efficient cause of intellectual progress. Alone and unassisted the most illustrious

achievements are accomplished. Great thinkers, writers and actors in life, rely upon themselves, educate their own minds and form their own characters. It was by the aid and instruction of no royal society, but by his own studious observation, that Galileo revealed the mysteries of the skies. It was no association of reform, but his own inward spirit that taught and nerved Luther to take and maintain his noble stand for truth and the right. No University opened its doors to Shakspeare, but the marvelous sweep of his unaided genius gathered the knowledge and wisdom of all time, and gave to the world those incomparable dramas which have enthroned him, the "paragon of nature." The great productions of the intellect have emanated not from learned orders or associated minds, but from individual exertion. Eminence in any pursuit of fame is achieved single-handed.

Strange as it may seem, when man has the most aid and assistance, he performs the least work, for, as the necessity of self-exertion diminishes, the mind becomes torpid. We find accordingly that those who have attained the highest eminence; who have marked out for themselves new pathways to glory, have advanced themselves; have arisen from some retired spot, where they have held long and silent intercourse with their own thought, and taught by examples of the past, have been quickened to lofty emu-

lation. The eagle is always nurtured on the solitary rock. The great man, whether the disciple of the schools or not, must ever be self-made. It is the necessity of his being. Were he fashioned in the mechanical moulds of his fellows, he could not become superior. To gain its greatest vigor, the mind must toil by itself, and be its own master.

Again, too often are we discouraged by ascribing high attainments and culture to superior gifts of intellect; to natural genius, rather than to industry. There is, no doubt, an original difference in minds, but no greater than the difference which is created by mental energy. The great dissimilarity between men; between the great and the small; the powerful and the feeble, is energy—a purpose once resolutely formed, and then the life struggle and strain for its accomplishment. Without this quality, no talents, no opportunities will bring success. Nature may have been more bountiful to some than to others, but there are few who have not faculties, which, by due care and cultivation, may be brought to a high degree of excellence. By reason of natural endowments some minds undoubtedly require less labor for their development than others. Some soils are more prolific than others, but labor properly directed will enrich the most forbidding. He who has the courage and tenacity of purpose slowly to climb round after round of the ladder of life, without being discouraged, fre-

quently will pass others, who have been tempted by the agility and ease with which they started, to relax effort and loiter on the way. Men of the most moderate talents have, by ardent exertion, outstripped the inactive and undisciplined genius, and won the prizes of life. Ordinary minds, by well-directed effort, have climbed the rugged steep, and attained greatness, leaving far behind many of more brilliant gifts and higher promise. In contemplating the eminence which some men have reached, we rarely consider the means by which it was accomplished, and attribute to them greater natural capacities and advantages ; whereas, if we were permitted to behold the path by which they ascended, we should find it rough and painful, and that it was only by strenuous and persevering exertion that they succeeded in reaching their envied elevation. We behold the pyramids of the Nile, and, wrapt in wonder at their grandeur, would believe them the work of an age superior in power. But when we recall the fact that they were formed by the laying of one stone upon another, we realize that no other means were employed in their erection than every age and nation can command. No great work can be accomplished, even by the most gifted of men, without intense effort and close application. "Excellence," said Sir Joshua Reynolds, "is never granted to man but as the reward of labor. If you have great talents, industry will improve them. If you have but mode-

rate abilities, industry will supply their deficiency. Nothing is denied to well-directed labor ; nothing is to be obtained without it." We can unfold and expand our higher nature, not by a life of indulgence, ease and pleasure, but only by "scorning delights and living laborious days." The mind exerts its mightiest force, the imagination soars to its sublimest height, the soul rises to its most glorious rapture, from the secluded study. The greatest genius attained his greatness by the severest labor. The names of the brightest spirits that illumine history had been unregistered, had they not aroused in their might, and worked with a heroic energy. Why was the "blind bard of Scio's isle" or his epic brother of England, denied the exquisite delight of beholding the splendor of the day ? Dearly did they pay for their nightly vigils. For the acuteness of their spiritual, they lost their earthly vision. No excellence lights on man unsought, as from the passing wind.

"The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

The mandate, that by the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread ; by the sweat of thy brow shalt thou cultivate and improve thy powers is imperative. The self-cultivating man must not only labor, but he must persevere in laboring. He must cherish fortitude and endurance, those sublime gifts which enable

man to walk fearlessly through the dark, and patiently await the bright hours of life. The way is long and toilsome, and the gallant heart that would pursue it must falter not nor tire until the end. To expect any great culture without patient application and persevering labor is as unwise as to expect to ascend the mountain without climbing. Attainments quickly made are as quickly lost. The work that is speedily finished is as speedily destroyed. Throughout all time the greatest exhibitions of genius have been the result of the most untiring exertion. All the displays of human art which have reached excellence, are instances of the resistless force of perseverance. The master-pieces of genius have only been produced by patience. Even in our own age the most splendid performance in the dramatic world, the "Ion" of Talfourd, was completed by the toil of twenty years. And the first specimen in art, Dannecker's "Christ," was perfected by the unceasing study of a long life. Great works are performed, not more by strength than by perseverance. All learning depends upon incessant attention. Newton ascribed all his greatness to unwearied study and observation. We may safely affirm that it produces a greater inequality in the race, than genius. Without it even genius can make no lasting impression. With it the most common ability can erect a monument which will withstand the touch of decay.

If difficulties perplex — if weariness oppresses ; remember that by the continued use of the spade and pick-axe mountains are removed. Life is a battle in which success can only be won by fighting. If there were no contests, there could be no victory. Difficulties may intimidate the weak, but they act as a stimulus to men of pluck. They incite the high-spirited into fiercer onslaughts. “Is there one,” said Dr. Hunter, “whom difficulty disheartens — who bends to the storm? He will do little. Is there one who will conquer? That kind of a man never fails.” The resolve that inspires to noble endeavor in any enterprise will finally find the means for its realization. If you overcome one obstacle, if you take one step in advance this day, you will have greater strength to progress to-morrow. Courage and perseverance, crushing all impediments, will insure success. These forces can break through barriers erected by either nature or society. By opening the Isthmus of Suez, they have made the Cape of Good Hope shorten its double ; by piercing Mont Cenis they have brought the Alps to bow their heads ; by the Cable’s link of continents they have, in the hourly communication between nations, robbed the Ocean of its expanse. We find them forming from the illest subject the most perfect orator that ever harangued from the forum or the tribune. We find them making the hero of fifty-six battles, notwithstanding the multiplicity of regal duties, bodily in-

firmities and shortness of life, the greatest scholar that England had then produced. We find them storing the mind of a poor boy by the light from street lamps, with a greater fund of knowledge than had ever before or has ever since reached the Pope-dom. There are no difficulties however great, that courage and perseverance cannot overcome. There is no eminence, however high, that the daring and persistent student may not hope to reach. Knowledge and greatness bow and confess themselves "the slaves of the lamp and of him who burns it."

With the qualities of which we have spoken, every man, whether his situation in life be free or confined, whether his circumstances be favorable or unfavorable, can perform the high task of training, disciplining and developing his intellect. With these forces the way and the means will be given. If he be whole-souled he need never despair because he has not enjoyed the advantages of the universities; because he has not received the aid and help of great masters. What if fortune frowns upon him—diligence and stoutness changes her frowns into smiles. Nearly all great men have been tried in the fires of poverty and adversity. Oftener do we behold "the fulgent head," rising from the lonely cottage than from the lordly palace. Often do we behold the man with the fewest advantages, rising superior to him who has enjoyed the most. "The mill streams,"

says Sir Arthur Helps, "that turn the clappers of the world, arise in solitary places." Obstacles may lie in the way ; impediments, seemingly insurmountable, may present themselves — yet what are these when met with courage ? Men conquer when they feel they can. Brave men never despair, and, therefore, seldom wholly fail. They advance where the timid retire. "Go forward," said Cæsar to a frightened pilot in a rough sea, "and fear nothing, thou carriest Cæsar and his fortunes." In an earnest and sincere heart obstacles will only increase the desire and the power to surmount them. Trial invigorates the mind; opposition sharpens the intellect. The severity to which many a mind has been inured in its youth has only served to strengthen its energies. It may well be doubted, whether Franklin, who started a poor printer's boy, and made himself the foremost philosopher of his age, had drawn electricity from the clouds had he not been early thrust out to contend alone with the elements; or whether Edison, who started a poor newsboy, had by his wonderful discoveries, ever brought electricity into practical use as an illuminating and propelling power, if poverty had not driven him to the closest application and the most thorough cultivation of the powers of observation, inquiry and reflection. When a man's situation in life is too easy, he is apt to sink into a lethargy, from which he rarely arouses. In climates where nature spontaneously provides for man's wants, his mind becomes dormant,

and he falls nearly as low as the plants which furnish him sustenance; but in severer latitudes where the products of the land are denied to him, except by means of his labor, he is driven for subsistence to the exercise and development of his faculties. The mind rises in its majesty, when it has to battle with the stern and rugged realities of life. It strives and labors hardest when tormented most. When it meets with obstinate resistance it makes obstinate attacks, but if permitted to recline on the soft couch of advantage, indolence lulls it into a slumber from which there is no awakening.

Self-education imparts a sturdiness to character. He who has himself removed the darkness that surrounded his path, has gained greater strength than the son of fortune, whose way has been unobscured. The strife and struggle for enlightenment bring out whatever is great in the heart. It is in the hottest of the fight that the most daring deeds of heroism are performed. The blasts of adversity reveal the grit and the good that is in men. When the storms of autumn have stripped the forests of their foliage, the granite of the mountain is discernible.

When we consider that true greatness comes from the man and not from position, title or rank, we recognize his capability as a man, whatever his pursuit or profession; his tendency to goodness; his

capacity for usefulness, and that he is no victim of necessity, no creature of time, no thrall of circumstance, but is just what he makes himself to be; that the noble heart dwells as often under the plain habit as costly robes; that the great mind is found as often under the skull-cap as the royal crown.

These lessons teach that "the fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves, if we are underlings." They incite man to be true to himself; to reverence his own thought and act; to exercise his faculties; to release himself from the restraints of society; to depend upon himself, rather than to trust to others. They show that he who by self-effort achieves an illustrious career is a noble of nature's creating.

Thus considered, the moral of our subject presses itself upon all.

"If thou would'st win a lasting fame,
If thou the immortal wreath would'st claim,
And make the future bless thy name,

Begin thy perilous career,
Keep high thy heart, thy conscience clear,
And walk thy way without a fear.

And if thou hast a voice within,
That ever whispers, 'work and win,'
And keeps thy soul from sloth and sin,

Whatever obstacles control,
Thine hour will come—go on—true soul,
Thou'lt win the prize, thou'lt reach the goal."

But if you fail in the attempt; if your pursuit should end before the full realization of your expect-

tations, yet your engagement in it will not have been in vain. You will at least have purified yourself from low desire, and acquired a wisdom and knowledge, which will be a perpetual source of entertainment and enjoyment. Grant that you are unable to reach the summit, to which you aspired, still you will have passed life more nobly, than the unthinking multitude. Fortune may withhold that "glorious accident, a name below," but you will have lifted yourself above her favors, and become fitted for higher destiny hereafter.



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